

Andragoška spoznanja, 2014, 20(3), 41–55

DOI: <http://dx.doi.org/10.4312/as.20.3.41-55>

UDK 374.7

Scientific paper

*Tiina Tambaum, Helina Kuusk*

## OLDER MEN AS DEEP-ROOTED TREES OF WISDOM

### ABSTRACT

*This qualitative study was carried out among older men in the rural municipality of Tartu, Estonia. The data was gathered with the intention of exploring the obstacles encountered and motivational aspects employed when trying to convince older men to share their knowledge. The study revealed the existence of untapped potential in the involvement of older men in the exchange of knowledge. It also highlights didactic solutions for challenges encountered in the processes of older men's learning and knowledge-sharing. The study revealed older men's preferences for practical learning and knowledge-sharing. Men are willing to share their professional skills: that which they have acquired either at work in the household. Older men also demonstrated a lack of flexibility when the correctness of their views was challenged, which may present an obstacle to informal knowledge sharing between generations. The Estonian educational system for the elderly is based on the participants' own initiative and active involvement, but unfortunately this is just what men in the municipality of Tartu lacked.*

**Keywords:** older men, passing on skills, informal learning, rural area

### STAREJŠI MOŠKI KOT DREVESA MODROSTI Z GLOBOKIMI KORENINAMI – POVZETEK

*Kvalitativna študija je bila izvedena med populacijo starejših moških v podeželski skupnosti v Tartuju v Estoniji. Podatki so bili zbrani z namenom raziskati ovire, ob katere zadenemo pri poskusu prepričati starejše moške k temu, da bi prenašali svoje znanje, in odkriti potencialne motivacijske dejavnike. Študija je pokazala, da ne vključenost starejših moških v izmenjavo znanja pomeni neizkoriščen potencial. Hkrati je osvetlila didaktične rešitve za nekatere izzive v procesih učenja in izmenjave znanja ob udeležbi starejših moških. Študija je razkrila, da so starejši moški bolj naklonjeni praktičnemu učenju in izmenjavi znanja, pri katerih lahko izkoristijo svoje znanje, ki so ga pridobili bodisi v svojem poklicu bodisi pri delu doma. To znanje so pripravljene prenašati na druge. Hkrati se je pri starejših moških pokazalo pomanjkanje fleksibilnosti, ko gre za dvom o pravilnosti njihovih pogledov, kar bi lahko bila ovira pri izmenjavi znanja med generacijami. Estonski izobraževalni sistem za starejše temelji na pobudi in aktivnosti samih udeležencev, ki pa ju pri moških iz Tartuja ni bilo.*

**Ključne besede:** starejši moški, posredovanje znanja, neformalno učenje, podeželsko okolje

*Tiina Tambaum, M. A., Estonian Institute for Population Studies, [tiina.tambaum@tlu.ee](mailto:tiina.tambaum@tlu.ee)*

*Helina Kuusk, M. A., Institute of Educational Science, Tallinn University, [helina\\_kuusk@hotmail.com](mailto:helina_kuusk@hotmail.com)*

## THEORETICAL BACKGROUND

According to several authors, older adult learning is the domain of women. Older men, especially those from rural areas and with lower levels of education, participate less in all educational endeavours (Withnall, 2010).

Formosa (2012) points out that the reason for infrequent attendance in learning activities offered for men is the content and the way this content is advertised. For example, courses or lectures at the Universities of the Third Age are aimed at health care and largely deal with health issues that concern women, such as obesity or osteoporosis. Also, the organisers at the Universities of the Third Age are women, and this situation encourages women to offer content and form which they find interesting. Studies conducted at Australian Universities of the Third Age reveal that older men and women confirm that their interests are different. In short: they like to do different things (Williamson, 2000, in Russell, 2007).

According to many scholars, older men becoming “invisible” has become a significant problem due to a lack of studies on the same (Russell, 2007). Golding notes that studies on isolated men and especially on working-class men help us understand their roles and masculinities, and how they cope with their frustrations and negative attitudes (Golding, 2011). There are a few studies on older persons’ learning and participation in the community in Estonia (Metsaorg, 2013; Paju, 2005; Kasepalu, Laidmäe and Tulva, 2013), but even they do not differentiate men in their analysis.

According to socio-cultural approaches to learning, social relationships are important and knowledge is created between two or more persons (Schunk, 2012). Dewey states that learning will always take place in a social context; knowledge is socially constructed and is based on experience. For Dewey, experience is a broader concept, that of not just knowledge, but living and life in general (Elkjær, 2009). The socio-cultural approach argues that learning is affected by social, organisational, cultural, and other contextual factors. Learning does not take place in isolation from its context (Hager, 2012).

When looking at men as learners, Withnall make the point that adult education and community learning for men is always contextual, involving both bottom-up and top-down structures, and it is based on relationships and context rather than individual, cognitive and behavioural interactions (Withnall, 2010). Golding, Mark, and Foley (2014) conclude in older men’s learning studies that the most effective learning method for a large proportion of men who have little prior formal educational background is informal, local, and community-based and relies on what men know, can do, and are interested in.

Field points out that learning is a process of mutual giving and receiving and that social relationships are created in collaboration with others (reference to Golding, Mark, & Foley, 2014). A positive attitude towards the elderly as givers rather than as passive consumers can help older people themselves to improve their attitudes and quality of life (Boudiny & Mortelmans, 2011). Wenger (1998) argues that learning and transferring knowledge is the same process, in which it is difficult to distinguish between the various

constituents. However, teaching and learning are not each other's mirror image. Learning can take place without teaching, just as teaching does not create learning in itself, but creates a context in which to learn.

Based on the theoretical principles of mutual giving and receiving, the authors of this paper were interested in the ways in which older people see themselves as givers or sharers of their skills and knowledge. The research question was the following: What is the readiness to share knowledge and skills among older men in rural communities and what are the obstacles, motivations, and organisational details?

## THE AGING POPULATION IN ESTONIA

Estonia has 1.3 million residents, 27% of whom are 25 years old or younger and 18% of whom are 65 or older. 68% of the country's population is made up of Estonians. In 2012, life expectancy at the moment of birth was 77 for Estonians. The life expectancy of men and women differs by 10 years (72 and 82, respectively). 32% of the Estonian population lives outside of cities. Older people in Estonia are characterised by quite poor health. In 2012, the average number of healthy years was just 55.

A coping study among the 50–74 age group (Linno, 2010) highlighted that, in the previous 12 months, only 16% of people of pension age had participated in a course, workshop, or seminar, or had engaged in independent learning. Among those who had been actively studying, 42% of men preferred independent learning and informal education as compared to 30% of women.

National adult education statistics from 2011 showed that the 50–64 age group had just 50% of computer users. In the older age group, the share of computer users is lower among men than among women (M 48%, W 53%); at the same time, the share of users with an expert level is larger among men (M 13%, W 9%).

The Social Welfare Act outlines educational and developmental activities for older people; it defines the social services the state must provide based on need. The latter include a service to support the independent coping and development of people. Local governments are obliged to guide people in the use of their spare time, and to mould their personal and everyday skills by involving them in activities that develop their skills. The reason why the services as described by law often do not reach older people is the point of origin – a letter of referral or the need the person has expressed. If a retired person complains about deficiencies in knowledge or skills without displaying any physical symptoms, the complaint may not even take an official turn.

Larger or more active local governments have established centres that offer these legal services; these are called day centres or social centres. The function of these centres is divided into three categories – services (e.g. hairdressing), hobby groups, and events. In 2012, approximately 40,000 older people (out of 234,000 people aged 65 or older) participated in the services, groups, and events offered by the centres.

In the field of education for older people, the Universities of the Third Age have garnered a lot of attention in Estonia. All of these organisations primarily implement the French principles (Formosa, 2012) by offering lectures and inviting experts and public figures (e.g. ministers and professors) to give talks. There is always a great deal of interest in the lectures. The participants often have higher levels of education and are mostly women. Of the four Universities of the Third Age, three are active in Tallinn alone.

### **The Municipality of Tartu**

The population of the Tartu municipality is 6990. The share of people above the age of 60 is 19%, and men aged 60 or older make up 8% of the population. This is a municipality located next to the city of Tartu, the second largest urban area in Estonia. The area of the municipality is 300 km<sup>2</sup>.

Two small hamlets host regular meetings of the Country Women's Association. One hamlet has a women's folk dancing group, women's choir, and mixed choir, while the other has a brass band and village choir. The municipality has six libraries, which can be counted as the only educational offer for older men. There are no additional non-formal or informal community activities for middle-aged and older citizens provided by the municipality or NGOs.

The municipality has been governed for 20 years by one mayor. Until 1991, the municipality had a collective farm and state farm on its territory, on which most of today's pension-aged people worked. When Estonia regained its independence, the assets of the holdings were privatised and people had to quickly adapt to the principles of an open market economy.

### **RESEARCH METHODOLOGY**

Since the readiness and practices for older men's learning and self-realisation have not been studied in Estonia before, a study with qualitative methods was conducted. The municipality of Tartu does not have a service offering coordinated activities for older men. The municipal government does not deny the theoretical problem, but has not thought of a solution either. This study was not commissioned by the municipality.

The data was gathered via semi-structured interviews. The aim was to use content analysis to determine indicators of current activities and the future wishes of men regarding existing skills and knowledge, readiness to share these, external obstacles, and impetus. The inductive content analysis method was used to analyse the interviews.

The interviews were conducted in summer 2013. The length of each interview was 60-90 minutes. The initial information on pension-aged men was received from the municipal government, after which the interviewer contacted the men by phone. During the interviews the men recommended other interviewees, the circle of which also expanded thanks to the municipality's residents, including recommendations from local activity

leaders. The final selection was based on the age-specific proportion of the respondents; geographic location was also considered, as was the aim of involving men with different levels of education (seven with higher education, four with vocational education, and the remainder with secondary or basic education).

The interviews were conducted with 31 men from four hamlets and nine villages. The interviewees were two disability pensioners in their 50s, 15 men in their 60s, 11 men in their 70s, and three in their 80s. Six of the men had full-time jobs. Among the men who participated, seven used or had used a computer, four were principally against using it and the others were non-committal.

The results of initial content analysis revealed eight indicators and values of direct purposeful teaching and sharing one's skills and knowledge.

## FINDINGS

### **Readiness to Share One's Skills and Knowledge Purposefully**

29 of the 31 men expressed their readiness to pass on their skills and knowledge. One refused, and one interview did not reveal if there was any basic agreement.

Basic agreement is divided into two categories. The first group of respondents (12 men; from here on the number of relevant men is given in parentheses) had already considered it, had previous teaching experience or, during the interview, could see themselves passing on their skills and knowledge and immediately started talking about the details of the situation.

- (Dance lesson) I could give dancing lessons. I'd need a partner though. /.../ If you go to a party in the local area, it's good to have a partner [who can dance well enough]. There's a lady in Kõrveküla village, a bit older than me. When we dance, others always look at us. There's a lot to teach. They say that when you dance you have to relax your body, but some people are very stiff.

- Yes, I agree. I could teach youngsters how to maintain and care for their technical equipment, their bicycles and scooters. I could tell them and teach them that you have to also take of your equipment, not just 'step on it!' I could teach them how to look after and fix simple agricultural equipment, too. I'd agree to that – if my help and advice is needed, then let's do it!

All four men with previous teaching experience expressed their active readiness. From the age perspective, men in their 60s expressed a more active approach (10).

The second group of respondents (18) did not say no, but their expressions regarding the teaching situation were passive and lacked confidence.

- If I could give advice or teach people, then why not, but it should probably be in the field of agriculture or animal husbandry. Horse husbandry and related fields.

### **Motivations for Passing on Skills**

Three distinct groups of reasons that do not cancel one another out emerged in the interviews regarding motivations for passing on skills. The motivation named most often was that of the positive emotion one gains from sharing one's experience (6). This emotional experience is valued by both former workers and managing workers and it is not related level of education.

- (Power stations) I'd be happy for the old guy [i.e. the interviewee himself].

Among other things, personal developmental reasons that would accompany teaching were expressed – teaching would bring about changes (1), teaching would enable one to keep oneself familiar with the topic (1), and teaching experience is interesting (2). The educational backgrounds of these men were different.

- (Turning) I could take on an apprentice. /.../ They'd bring something new into my life.

- (Fishing) Well, if I could, I'd take someone with me. It would be interesting. I always teach the little guy [the interviewee's grandson] – he's a tough little kid. It [fishing] is different to what you see in the movies.

Men are also ready to share their skills with others for external reasons (6).

- I could teach children to appreciate nature. Whenever the municipality plants a tree – I don't know if there are any left! It should be arranged so that every child has their own tree. Then the kids would protect them and not damage them.

### **Ways of Passing on One's Skills**

When describing what they imagine to be purposeful teaching, half of the interviewees tended to favour a practical individual process with demonstration and a hands-on principle (16). All of these men had learned their professional skills fully or in part through independent learning, while at the same time, all levels of general education were represented among them.

- (Bicycle repairs) I'd teach. /.../ They come to my garage and we take the wheel off. I let them do it.

- (Optimising driving) I could give advice. Even strangers are welcome. /.../ If someone was here I'd show them the tricks of the trade.

If someone pictured themselves passing on more theoretical information (5), this was preferred in a small group in a more private way.

- (Village history lectures) They've been sweet-talking me for a while now. I only offer readings... It could be done privately.

- (War time) I don't like to speak at all. I'd never do that. If there was someone [interested] who I could discuss it with, then yes.

The last example presents a viewpoint many interviewees (5) expressed clearly – men do not like the lecture format or theoretical teaching. Discussions in small groups and with people they know are more acceptable.

- (Electrical equipment) I'm not the lecturer type. I like talking and discussing things. Let's open a nice bottle of wine and chat.

### **Those to Whom the Men are Ready to Pass on their Skills and Knowledge**

As expected, family members – primarily children and grandchildren – were named as the target group for knowledge-sharing.

The majority of the interviewees (20) saw adults in general as their target group, including peers. For three-quarters (15), sharing their skills and knowledge with adults did not mean teaching, but exchanging experiences individually or in small groups.

More than a third of the interviewees expressed their readiness or at least were not against the idea of educating young people (12).

- (Wrestling) I'd have nothing against it. /.../ To make them interested, and make the boys braver.

At the same time, many did not believe that the young (or people younger than them) were interested in learning practical skills or knowledge from older people. Thus, older men are essentially prepared to pass these on, but are pessimistic about such willingness being realised.

- (Farm work) I've even got the damn tools. Of course I'd help. I like it when people ask me stuff. They're not people my age – they have their own way of doing things. But they really don't want to work either. I have no hope for them. I don't think there's anyone who'd come and ask. The young are lazy – they have no enthusiasm for anything. Make them work, I say. They've never done a day's work in their lives.

Men see younger generations as being alienated from practical skills, with the reasons given being general changes in society.

- That's how our country's structured. Do you hear anyone talking about state plumbers or state sewer workers? No, they talk about artists. You can live without art, but what will you do when your toilet gets backed up? We've not noticed anyone interested in things like that here.

The difference between their own generation and youth, their attitude towards it, and their positions regarding the young are characterised by the following quote:

- Young people are taught to think differently. They have more democracy. They're used to it. /.../ They speak and think like they're taught at school. Their beliefs are what society has fed them. They're nudged in a certain direction. Why would I bother making a stand against the entire educational system? They learn about computers and do less physical work. They're smart and pretty. I once listened to a girl speaking – so diplomatic, using such grand words. All this nice talk can be taught.

### **Skills and Knowledge to Be Passed On**

It is mostly professional skills that older men feel confident enough to pass on to others (27). During the interviews, the men revealed the trade or practical skill they had learned, worked with, or applied at home (with many men of this generation being e.g. amateur builders who built their own homes).

- I can give advice on equipment. On building. On gardening, too.
- I learned plumbing from my workers. The PRIA project was here: they came and asked for my advice.

A smaller proportion of men proffered a hobby or topic they had studied in depth in their spare time and that did not relate to paid work or work around the house (7).

- I could talk about UFOs. I'd prepare properly for that. Get some stuff off the computer. Just talking would be boring.

### **Physical Obstacles to Passing on One's Skills and Knowledge**

The majority of the interviewees did not express any obstacles to sharing their skills and knowledge in one form or another (25). Poor or unstable health was mentioned by three of the men. Important here is that the influence of health on the readiness of teaching and on actual teaching are two different things. Health does not affect readiness to teach, but it does affect the actual teaching process.

- (Accordion) People have wanted to come for lessons from as far afield as Tallinn, but I haven't had the time – I've been sick.

Another obstacle was the issue of not having the necessary (or modern) tools to pass on skills (2). The latter was a significant obstacle when talking about the young. If there were physical obstacles, usually only one was mentioned, not several at the same time.



## Psychological Obstacles in Passing on One's Skills and Knowledge

Internal arguments were mentioned as obstacles in passing on one's skills and knowledge. Most often this manifested itself as uncertainty as to whether one's skills and knowledge were sufficient (6).

- (Electricity) When I studied it, things were different – the competency thing has changed. Work techniques and safety requirements... it's all entirely different.

At the same time, some admitted that when the young person in question is a complete amateur, the basics of the area have not changed – so somewhat outdated tools and knowledge of trends are not obstacles to passing on knowledge.

Doubts regarding one's suitability to pass on skills and knowledge made up a third group of psychological obstacles, but such opinions were clearly expressed by only three men.

As with attitudes towards the young, psychological obstacles in the exchange of information between adults were sensed not so much in regard to oneself but to others. Life experience in everyday teaching and learning situations has taught the men that it is better to keep their wisdom to themselves than share it. It is sensed that the fixed opinions and attitudes of others are too difficult to change.

- /Disappointedly/ Everyone's smart these days.

- We discuss politics, but that's not much use. And nobody listens. Everyone does what they think is right. You get angry when you talk about things.

The men clearly saw other adults as learners and themselves as the party aware of the absolute truth. In other words, the men described the learning process in an informal form but did not see themselves equally as givers and receivers but only as providers of information.

- There's a big difference with 40-year-olds. I'm right, but they talk and think they're right.

- History is really one-sided [as written]. If you read a newspaper article that's based on history, there are lots of factual errors. It's the kind of thing I don't bother pointing out. If luck's with you, live your life; if you're healthy, work.

## Organisational Solutions and Proposals

The study demonstrates that although the men express readiness to share their skills and knowledge, they generally lack the initiative to do so. They presume that someone else will make the first move, approaching them or gathering together everyone involved.

- (Dance lessons) First we'd have to see whether anyone was interested. There'd be no point if there were less than ten pairs. I don't know if the local government is even interested in it.

Moreover, the men prefer it when people know what to ask and have very specific tasks.

- (Wood and metal work) I like people who know what they want.

When talking about specific readiness to share one's skills and knowledge, money was not mentioned in 25 of the interviews. The other common argument – a lack of time – did not come up in the interviews. However, the need for a flexible schedule was mentioned (2) because of changes in health or a need to be available to children and grandchildren.

In order to create a context for the preparedness of older men to share their skills and knowledge, information on how they themselves gained skills and knowledge was analysed – i.e. their own learning experience. Although there was no specific question about this in the interview (at the beginning of which a question was merely asked about their educational level), 23 of the interviewees revealed that they had gained all or some of the skills needed in life (e.g. building) at work, without specialist training.

- When I was young I developed an interest in machinery. When I was 10 I rode on the tractor with my father. And then, one time, my father jumped off a moving tractor. It was really dusty. It was like learning to swim. I'm sure he knew that his boy [the interviewee] had some knowledge. After that, my father rarely got behind the wheel.

The analysis revealed that the men rarely used the word “teach” in the interviews. Often the word was present in the context of theoretical teaching (i.e. that they would not teach theoretically). Three men used the word “teach” regarding children or grandchildren (teaching them to play checkers and chess and teaching them to appreciate nature). One interviewee claimed that he would teach the entire scale on a trumpet and one man described that “there's a lot to teach” generally, referring to a lack of dancing skills among adults.

When describing their skills and how people have approached them, the men used words and expressions like “help,” “give advice,” “show the tricks of the trade,” “pass on skills,” and “guide”. With peers, they would rather discuss things and share experiences.

## DISCUSSION

Life experience gives older people the chance to take on the role of conveying skills and knowledge without pedagogical training. The qualitative study showed that older men in the municipality of Tartu are essentially ready to assume the role of passing on skills and knowledge. Of all the interviewees, it could be said that only one did not express such readiness. More than a third of the men participating in the study (12) were instantly able to describe the details of an imagined teaching situation. Considering this, the fact that only five of the men had actual teaching experience in the general educational system, and that men with different educational backgrounds expressed their readiness, the results represent a vast, untapped potential.

The possibility to be the sharer of knowledge and experience helps alleviate the problems observed among older people:

According to Kasepalu et al. (2013), 25% of older people in Estonia feel unneeded, which in turn affects their health and quality of life. The chance to share skills and knowledge could be one activity that makes older men feel needed. The latter can be argued because men saw the emotional factor as the main motivation for knowledge sharing.

Some men saw an opportunity for self-development as valuable in sharing skills, and these were not only men with higher education. A person passing on his knowledge feels that he can keep his skills sharp, remember half-forgotten knowledge, and stay up to date on innovations. This result corresponds directly with the viewpoint that every act of teaching is at the same time one of learning (Jarvis, 2006). Considering the limited participation of retired people in formal and non-formal education (Linno, 2010), sharing skills has the potential to be a satisfactory form of development for retired men.

The study referenced didactic techniques that can be applied in the process of older men's learning and knowledge-sharing. The term "teaching" applies especially to men with a very specific skill set in a situation in which the learner has no prior experience, particularly with children and young people as the target audience. In other cases, the term "teaching" should be avoided because older men do not find it relevant.

The study also clearly demonstrated that older men prefer to avoid theoretical training, particularly in the form of lectures, and instead share the information orally in small groups. Linno (2010) obtained a similar result when comparing differences in the preferences of older women's and older men's learning in Estonia. Thus, older men do not want to listen to a lecture nor give do they want to give on, but rather they prefer exchanging experience to theoretical one-way teaching and this preference may be a significant difference compared with women.

Considering the learning experiences of the men themselves – two thirds of whom learned their professional skills by trying, failing, and trying again – it is no wonder that they also preferred hands-on demonstration as a teaching method. Golding (2011) stresses that men prefer to learn *through* something, not *about* something, by applying the same principles they have used for years at work. This study confirms the same about passing on skills. The processes of passing on and acquiring skills and knowledge seem to be similar processes for older men.

The clearly preferred practical format in passing on knowledge agrees with the results, according to which most of the interviewees were ready to share skills connected with work done professionally or during their lives. Only seven ideas were related to hobbies. This can be interpreted as follows: the hobbies and work of men living in rural areas have no distinct boundaries, which means that activities geared towards social development should be provided in a work context. Tambaum (2010) reached a similar conclusion when studying the content preferences of older internet users. Golding et al. (2014) also claim that the most efficient way of learning is when men use what they know and can do.

The study revealed that there are some challenges with men's learning and knowledge-sharing. These are associated with older men's opposition to young people, as well as society and being up to date with it. Although children and young people were seen as the target group (one third of respondents supported this idea), however, older men did not believe the young would be interested in learning from them. Whereas the process of teaching between adults was imagined as an informal process, the role of children and the young was seen as that of empty vessels eager to be filled with knowledge. Furthermore, even regarding middle-aged people, older, more experienced men tended to take an inflexible position, bothered at the idea of the other person not accepting their word unconditionally. General disbelief and a sense of hopelessness regarding trends in society also emerged.

If the other half is not seen as a source of skills and knowledge and there is no dialogue, nothing will come of the mutual learning. In a post-modern society, older people's uncompromising attitudes in terms of their own standpoints and their role in society can become obstacles to the integration of different generations. For instance, of all of the men who participated in the study, only seven were computer users, four expressed a clear opposition to using computers, and the viewpoints of the others remained ambiguous. Statistics Estonia (2011) indicate low levels of computer use, particularly among older men. The complex reason here could be triggered by older men seeing themselves primarily as bearers of skills and knowledge and as stubborn autodidacts, not as receivers of skills and knowledge from younger people.

London stresses that learning triggers change. He points out that there are a number of changes during a person's lifetime that will bring out a change in one's behaviour, which in turn makes one adapt (London, 2011). The process of learning new skills triggered by changes seems to be hindered for older men. The study shows that although men express a readiness to share their skills and knowledge, they themselves generally lack the initiative to do so. They presume that someone else will make the first move, approaching them or gathering together everyone involved. Aside from general passivity, it is evident that the men present certain social aspects of concern that could be resolved through a study project with their own participation. But here, too, external organisational initiative was expected. There is almost no civic initiative among older men.

In this case, the reason for this may lie in the historical background of this social group or in the life experiences of older people. During their youth and middle age, older interviewees had lived in a socialist society in which initiative was part of the system. The community in question (the municipality of Tartu) has had a mayor marked by an autocratic style for 20 years. On the other hand, during the interviews, the men talked of failed attempts to teach those who were not willing to take advice. These are experienced men who know how to assess the probability of failure in every action. The former indicates the need for the empowerment of older citizens (Cusack, 2000), while the latter seems to conform to the results of Walker et al. (2012) that

as they age, most participants simply found that they have less capacity and energy to expend on social activities. They become more discerning about how they expend energy, particularly in terms of the emotional, social and support returns they secure from interactions.

Anyway, initiative means responsibility, and the results of the study suggest that older men avoid taking risks, but comfortably await offers.

Lack of initiative, passive readiness, and the so-called need for an agent form a clear contradiction to the current structure of the logic of self-development activities for older people in Estonia. In order to launch work at day centres or add topics of interest to men to the current programmes, the system requires initiative from the older people themselves. Also, it is presumed that teachers, organisers, and guides will step up from the target group as volunteers. Only Tallinn has enforced a social activity manager position at day centres; it is unlikely that such a regulation will be enforced in rural areas.

Using a metaphor, it can be said that in the process of sharing knowledge, older men see themselves as trees of wisdom with strong roots, as those who know the absolute truth and to whom reasonable young(er) people could come for advice. This tree of wisdom needs outside help, however, to integrate itself and its wisdom into the development of the community and society.

## CONCLUSION

Based on the qualitative study carried out among older men in the municipality of Tartu, the following conclusions can be drawn:

The involvement of older men sharing their skills and knowledge is an untapped resource in society. The target group for older men could be youth to whom practical basic skills could be taught, as well as middle-aged people and peers with whom experience can be shared. It was confirmed that the readiness indicates the practical need.

The process of passing on skills and knowledge by non-professionals should be studied in depth, as should the degree to which the emergence of developing dialogue is affected by the significant age difference between the mentee and the mentor.

The role of sharing skills and knowledge is a suitable way for older men to develop. Giving older people a teaching role is a good way to reduce the widespread feeling of being useless and to increase the sense of integration into society for older men.

An engagement of older men's informal learning in the community requires a very active and skilled initiator. The latter is incompatible with the adult educational system in Estonia with its bottom-up principles; therefore, it is necessary to initiate changes in awareness-raising or in the system.

Older men in the municipality of Tartu expressed inflexible attitudes regarding the correctness of their views, and disbelief in trends in the development of youth. This phenomenon may form an obstacle to informal education between generations and for general activities related to integration. This is why integration processes should be launched with activities in which both parties have something equally valuable to offer each other.

Just as it was confirmed with older men's learning that the practical context and specifics of the task ensures success, the study demonstrated that the same also applies to the second part of the process – sharing knowledge and skills. In addition, it is important that the process should be called not “teaching” but “helping,” “showing,” or “advising”.

## ACKNOWLEDGEMENT

Article supported by the European Social Fund and by Grundtvig program.

## REFERENCES

- Boudiny, K., and Mortelmans, D. (2011). A Critical Perspective: Towards a Broader Understanding of “Active Aging.” *Electronic Journal of Applied Psychology*, 7(1), 8-14.
- Cusack, S. (2000). Critical educational gerontology and the imperative to empower. In F. Glendenning (ed.) *Teaching and Learning in Later Life. Theoretical Implications* (pp. 61-75). Aldershot: Ashgate Arena.
- Elkjaer, B. (2009). Pragmatism: A learning theory for the future. In I. Knud (ed.), *Contemporary theories of learning* (pp. 74-89). Oxon: Taylor & Francis.
- Formosa, M. (2012). Four decades of Universities of the Third Age: past, present, future. *Ageing & Society*, 34(1), 42-66.
- Golding, B. (2011). Social, Local, and Situated Recent Findings About the Effectiveness of Older Men's Informal Learning in Community Contexts. *Adult Education Quarterly*, 61(2), 103-120.
- Golding, B., Mark, R., and Foley, A. (2014) (eds). *Men Learning Through Life*. Leicester: NIACE.
- Hager, P. (2012). Informal Learning: everyday living. In P. Jarvis and M. Watts (eds.) *The Routledge International Handbook of learning* (pp. 207-215). London: Routledge.
- Jarvis, P. (2006). The Socratic Method. In P. Jarvis (ed.). *The Theory and Practice of Teaching* (p. 97). London: Routledge.
- Kasepalu, Ü., Laidmäe, V.-L., and Tulva, T. (2013). Health and Quality of Life in Older Age in Estonia. *European Journal of Health*, 1(1), 11-34.
- Linno, T. (ed.) (2010). *A Coping Study among Older People 2009*. Ministry of Social Affairs. Statistics Estonia. Retrieved from <http://pub.stat.ee/>.
- London, M. (2011). *The Oxford Handbook of Lifelong Learning*. Oxford: University Press.
- Metsaorg, Ö. (2013). Täenduslikud kogemused elukäigus. Tallinn: Tallinna Ülikooli Kasvatusteaduste Instituut.
- Paju, I. (2005). Õppimine elutee kontekstis: eakate arusaamades. Tallinn: Tallinna Ülikooli Kasvatusteaduste Instituut.
- Russell, C. (2007). What Do Older Women and Men Want?: Gender Differences in the 'Lived Experience' of Aging. *Current Sociology*, 55(2), 173-192.
- Schunk, D. (2012). *Learning Theories: An Educational Perspective*. Boston: Pearson.
- Statistics Estonia. (2011). Retrieved from <http://pub.stat.ee/>.

- Tambaum, T. (2010). Expectations of the Elderly for the Internet as an Influencing Factor for Internet Teaching. *Problems of Education in the 21st Century*, 22, 117-129.
- The Social Welfare Act*. Retrieved from [www.legaltext.ee/et/andmebaas/tekst.asp?loc=text&dok=X1043K15&keel=en&pg=1&ptyyp=RT&tyyp=X&query=sotsiaaltoolekande+seadus](http://www.legaltext.ee/et/andmebaas/tekst.asp?loc=text&dok=X1043K15&keel=en&pg=1&ptyyp=RT&tyyp=X&query=sotsiaaltoolekande+seadus).
- Walker, J., Orpin, P., Baynes, H., Stratford, E., Boyer, K., Mahjouri, N., Patterson, C., Robinson, A., and Carty, J. (2012). Insights and Principles for Supporting Social Engagement in Older People in Rural Areas. *Aging and Society*, 33(6), 938-963.
- Wenger, E. (1998). *Communities of Practice: Learning, Meaning, and Identity*. Cambridge: Cambridge University Press.
- Withnall, A. (2010). *Improving Learning in Later Life*. London: Routledge.